

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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### PRISONERS OF SILENCE.

By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "A Valiant Ignorance," "A Mere Cypher,"  
"Cross Currents," etc., etc.

#### CHAPTER XXXIII.

A LITTLE later North Branston had left the house, and was walking swiftly along the street towards his rooms. It was a lovely night. The air was soft but not oppressive, and from a cloudless sky the full moon shed a radiance beneath which streets and houses, without a beauty of their own, lay transfigured. North Branston's face was very still; his eyes were deep and glowing, and the light within touched his every feature into a peace such as had never rested on them before. He walked straight on, glancing neither to the right nor to the left, taking the right road mechanically and by instinct. The touch of Eve Karslake's hand was still upon him; her kiss still lingered on his lips; and in the realisation and satisfaction which that kiss had brought him, all his other senses—all cynicism, all bitterness, all weariness—were, for the moment, lulled to rest.

He reached the house in which he lived, and let himself in with his latch-key. As he went upstairs he noticed with a vague surprise that the door of his room was half open, and that there was a bright light within. He pushed the door open and went in, glancing about him involuntarily as he did so. And then he stopped suddenly short. Seated by the table, and facing the door, was Mrs. Vallotson.

For the instant, as his eyes rested on her, a flash of astonishment—the simple surprise created by her unexpected presence—touched North Branston's features. It

passed, superseded by a darkening and settling of his whole face; an instinctive blotting out of the unlikely and unlooked for in her appearance, even at such an hour, before that inalienable sense of antagonism and defiance which seemed in this all dominating assertion of itself to assert, also, its existence as the supreme factor in his being.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Adelaide!" he said slowly. "To what do I owe it?"

Mrs. Vallotson was dressed, as she had been when she left Lady Karslake's house an hour before, in a long black velvet mantle. She had no covering on her head, and her face, framed in her grey hair and set off by the sombre black which fell from her throat to her feet, looked almost ashen in its pallor. It was singularly noticeable that her colourlessness in no way tended to the refinement of her face. Still as it was on the surface, there seemed to be some kind of tense emotion stirring underneath, innately coarse in its suggestion. Her eyes glittered slightly with that singular and almost reckless excitement which is sometimes induced by the long-continued defiance and inexorable suppression of acute agony. She followed North with her eyes as he crossed the room, but she made no other movement.

"The wedding is not put off, I suppose?" She spoke with an abrupt assumption of carelessness most uncharacteristic of her, and her voice jarred a little.

"No!" he said grimly. "Why should it be put off?"

There was no reply. Mrs. Vallotson hardly seemed to have heard the question, and her eyes had wandered from North Branston's face and were fixed on the wall behind him. As though affected by the

silence in spite of himself, an added hardness settled about North Branston's mouth.

"I don't imagine that you have come here, at this time of night, to ask me that question, Adelaide," he said harshly. "If you'll tell me what you have come for I shall be glad. I've a good deal to do!"

With a feverish movement Mrs. Vallotson rose from her chair.

"Come for?" she said in an odd, uneven voice. "What should I have come for?"

"That is precisely what I should be glad to know!"

She looked at him for a moment, the excitement beating behind the rigid quiet of her features giving her face an indescribably painful effect. Then she turned violently away.

"For nothing, of course!" she said. "Nothing! To wish you well, I suppose. To—congratulate you."

The words themselves were nothing. But the tone in which they were uttered—high pitched, rasping, ringing, above all with an unconscious and irrepressible sneer—seemed to penetrate North Branston's sensibility instantaneously and to the quick. She had turned towards the door as she finished, with a rough, instinctive movement; but before she had gone two paces North Branston stood in her path, his face set and livid with suppressed passion, his lips white, a supreme intensity of questioning about his whole person.

"Adelaide," he said thickly and rapidly, "explain yourself. You've come here to-night for some purpose. What is it? To-morrow I begin my life again, and leave the past behind me. If there is any explanation of all that has come and gone between us, of which I do not know, tell it me to-night. If there is any reason, so far concealed from me, against my marriage, let me know it now!"

They were close together. The two dark faces were almost on a level. He saw a ghastly spasm or convulsion pass across her features, he saw something rise in her eyes unfathomable and terrible to meet, and then he saw her face set like a marble mask against his own. As though it came from a long way off he heard her voice, thin and distant.

"There is nothing concealed from you! There is nothing to be explained!"

A moment later, without haste and with a rigid self-possession which was full of dignity, she had passed him, as he mechanically made way for her, and reached the door. On the threshold she turned.

"Shall I find a cab?" she asked.

"I will come down with you!" he replied mechanically.

She passed directly out of the room and down the stairs, he following her. He put her into a passing vehicle and saw it lumber away, no other word having been spoken on either side.

When North re-entered his room alone, hardly ten minutes had passed since he entered it for the first time that night. The strange interview which had awaited him then had occupied but a brief space as seconds and minutes go. But in that brief space his mental condition had been totally altered. The calm in which he had been wrapped had been displaced by an intensity of excitement, created he hardly knew how or to what purpose.

He shut the door of his room, and looked about him with a sombre defiance lurking amid the stir of his expression. An indefinable shadow seemed to fill the room for him; something ominous and foreboding seemed to brood upon it. He crossed the room with a quick stride, and, sitting down at his writing-table, addressed himself to the work that was waiting for him. He had a few letters to write; and then he came to the real business before him—the sorting of his papers.

He worked on steadily, endorsing, destroying, putting by; and as the time passed on the concentration which he brought to his task acquired a dogged character. His lips grew compressed; his eyes never stirred beyond his hand.

All that was hardest, least sensitive, and most practical in North Branston was fighting instinctively and deliberately; fighting something within himself which he could hardly have defined, even if he had chosen to do so; fighting that strange excitement that possessed him as with a vague sense of crisis. His blood was tingling in his veins; his nerves, strung by his scene with Lady Karslake into a beatitude such as he had never known; and since so jarred and grated by Mrs. Vallotson's unexpected appearance, were in a state of acute sensibility. And all his instinct was arrayed against that same sensibility; arrayed to clutch at the commonplace and to repudiate the influence that held him.

His work came to an end at last. He rose and began to pace up and down the room as he lighted a cigar. He was intent, as he thought, on the process. He would smoke one cigar only, he told himself,

before he went to bed. And then, unrealised and unrestrained, his thoughts slipped quietly out of his control.

How far they had gone back! He was thinking of his childhood. He was seeing himself again as that little taciturn boy of whom Alncester had disapproved; but he had no thought of Alncester in the matter. He was remembering that little child as he had not remembered him for years. He was recalling, with that strange mixture of memory and mature comprehension which makes so vivid a picture, the waking of the childish perceptions to a sense that somehow or other little North Branston was not like other children, that his world was not their world, nor his life as their lives. He was recalling the sense—half-rebellious and half-sullen—of loneliness and injustice which had made the tragedy of his childhood. And he saw himself, through the mist of years, one of two figures only that stood out sharp and distinct in a common isolation against the shadowy phantasmagoria of his memory—a child and a woman.

His cigar went out between his fingers unnoticed, and he paced up and down. The law which connected the disillusionment of his childhood in his mind with that other and deeper disillusionment which had come to him later in life, might be subtle and far to seek. He did not seek it. He only saw himself again as a young man with aspirations, thoughts, affinities running deep and soaring high. He saw himself alone; shut in upon himself, without a friend, without a guide; forced into contact with that which developed all that was worst in him, the evil genius of his life. He saw his faiths wither and shrivel up in his hands; he saw his spiritual perceptions fail and run dry; he saw his scheme of life shrink and grow narrow until it could hold nothing intangible, nothing beyond this world. He saw himself drifting deliberately into pessimism; he saw himself become that bitterest of all cynics—the cynic whose cynicism is an armour against despair.

A long unconscious sigh roused him from his strangely vivid musings. He came back suddenly to the present; the young man and the child receded into the distance, and he of whom they had held the germ, the North Branston of the present day and hour, stood face to face with the future.

He sat down abruptly, propping his chin on his clenched hands, and looking straight before him. The clock on the mantelpiece struck two, but he did not hear it. His heart was beating slowly and heavily; the

sense of crisis no longer resisted was shaking him through and through. The sense of something ominous and foreboding in the very atmosphere of his room, and brought to it by Mrs. Vallotson's presence, seemed to rise suddenly and close round him until it became part of himself.

The future! The future, to-night, meant for him the morrow. Try as he would, beat against the intangible barrier as he might and did, he could get no further. All that mistily shining stretch of years to come which had unrolled itself before him on the night when he first realised that the solitude of his life was to be shared at last, on the night when the impulse towards reconciliation with Mrs. Vallotson had risen in him, was blotted out. The morrow, vague and shadowy, weighted with a strange and utterly inexplicable darkness, loomed up before him, shutting out all that was to lie beyond. And the centre figure of the future—let him repudiate the fact as he would—was the centre figure of the past; the isolation of the past was the isolation of the future. The influence of the woman he loved, the influence which only an hour before had thrilled him through and through, seemed to have been swept back into a region whither he could not follow it, driven forth by an indomitable power. He stood alone, conscious of his loneliness; conscious of his loss; resisting with every fibre, as a man wrestles with overwhelming physical odds. Out of the blackness which he strove to penetrate, strove to deny, one presence only confronted him—the presence of Mrs. Vallotson.

That there are influences about us other and more powerful than the tangible influences which we understand—influences against which, under certain circumstances, strength of nerve and brain is no slightest protection—is a theory which it is at least unwise wholly to deny. The September night wore on, the September dawn—the dawn of that morrow on which his thoughts were fixed—crept slowly into the sky, and still North Branston sat there by his table dominated and possessed by an influence which had no name, which took no tangible form. He had contested the ground inch by inch; he had denied it and defied it. And as the sunshine stole into the room he sat there still, grave and haggard, its helpless prey.

What was it? He had asked himself the question many times during the night. During the morning, as he went about his final preparations with his face set and stern, he asked himself the question again

and again. Was it a dull sense of foreboding? Was it the very acme of intense undefined anticipation? And instead of any answer from his reason, before his mental vision there would come the face of Mrs. Vallotson, dark, set, and antagonistic, as though the answer were to be found there.

The day grew gradually older. With every hour struck out by the clock the extraordinary tension on his nerves seemed to tighten, as every hour seemed to bring nearer that undefined crisis. He received the friend who was to be his best man, and sat down to luncheon with him like a man in a dream. Presently he was aware that they were walking together through the streets. He heard his friend ask him something about a ring. He put his hand into his pocket mechanically, drew out a little gold circlet, and looked at it curiously. It seemed to have nothing to do with him; to be utterly incongruous with the shadow in which he was living and moving. Then they stopped. A heavy door swung back before him, and he passed out of the September sunshine and the noise and bustle of the streets into the silent half light of a London church.

It was a large church belonging to that heavy and depressing school of architecture which obtained some fifty years ago. It was not half full, and the handful of smart people present seemed, in spite of the festivity of the occasion, to be entirely insufficient to dissipate the gloom of the edifice. The usual whispering chatter was going on, but it had a subdued sound. It ceased suddenly as North Branston walked up the aisle; and the dead silence against which his footsteps rang struck him with a chill which seemed at once to meet and focus the deadly sense of cold that was lying at his heart. All his senses were acutely, preternaturally, alive; all his perceptions were concentrated to one end; the discovery of the material position of the presence with which his every thought was weighted. Was Mrs. Vallotson there?

He walked up to the altar steps, and then he turned and deliberately scanned the faces ranged in the pews before him; scanned them regardless of smiles and little nods, even of beckonings, from the front pews; and scanned them in vain. Mrs. Vallotson was not in the church.

A long breath parted his lips; a breath partly of relief, partly of that strained anticipation which comes from the persistent veiling of a sword the existence of which is not to be denied. He stepped

forward in response to a loudly whispered adjuration from Mrs. Slade-Fenton, who occupied a prominent position, and then, becoming aware that an invitation was being tendered to him to go and speak to Archdeacon French in the vestry, he followed his guide in the same automatic fashion. He must have heard Archdeacon French's kindly words, for he heard his own voice responding in what seemed to be suitable fashion. But the first thing of which he was really conscious was the hurried advent of a verger, with the words:

"The lady's coming, sir!"

Without a word, with a leap of the heart before which all the shadows that surrounded him seemed to flee away, North Branston turned and went out into the church to meet his wife. And as he passed out of the vestry door his gaze fell on the face of Mrs. Vallotson as she sat in the front pew.

His best man saw his lips turn white and took him by the arm to turn him to his place before the altar steps. But North shook off his touch. With his whole figure braced, with every line of his face set into the supreme defiance of an iron resolution, he strode to where Archdeacon French was waiting, and stood there, with his back turned to the church, immovable. He heard the soft rustle of women's dresses coming up the aisle behind him; he felt that the woman he loved stood by his side; but he did not look towards her. Even then, at the very altar, at the very crisis of his repudiation and defiance of her presence, he was alone with the woman who had haunted him through the night; who sat behind now with her black eyes glazed and dead, staring straight into space.

"Dearly beloved,"

The congregation rose, and the woman who was sitting next to Mrs. Vallotson, a relation of Lady Karslake, glanced at her neighbour with an involuntary fascination; there was something indescribably strange about the movements with which the tall, solitary woman rose, and stood gripping the front of the pew.

The address rolled through the church. It ended, and the customary pause ensued. A strange sensation of cold crept over the woman whose eyes had been rivetted throughout on Mrs. Vallotson's clenched hands. Those hands seemed to have grown rigid. The figure to which they belonged seemed to have taken on the immobility of a corpse. Was her terrible



neighbour going to faint? she wondered. The pause was over. Archdeacon French turned to the pair before him and, in a low and solemn voice, began that charge than which the liturgy holds nothing more awe-inspiring and imposing.

"I require and charge you both as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgement, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured that so many as are coupled together otherwise than as God's Word doth allow are not joined together by God, neither is their matrimony lawful."

The woman next Mrs. Vallotson felt a stir in the seat beside her, and saw those rigid fingers unlock themselves and spread themselves out wildly. Turning instinctively to catch her if she should fall, she saw what all the congregation saw.

Mrs. Vallotson had left her place. A strange, dead silence filled the church. Lady Karslake was taking off her glove, and the attention of the little bridal party was concentrated on her movements, as Archdeacon French waited for her. The gaze of every other soul there present was fixed in a kind of spellbound fascination on the woman's figure unknown to almost every one there, drawing nearer and nearer, stumbling and swaying blindly, to the unconscious couple before the altar steps. Mrs. Vallotson uttered no sound. She seemed to be unconscious of spectators. Still in the same dreadful silence, she reached the bridal party, and pushed between the two who stood there side by side, thrusting them asunder. She turned her terrible white face to North, and then a hoarse, thick whisper came from her grey lips:

"Stop!" she said. "It—must not—be!"

The voice died away. Something seemed to rattle in her throat, and she fell heavily between them on the ground.

## BLIZZARD-BOUND.

### A WESTERN SKETCH.

FOR about a week we had all been enjoying that enforced holiday which a "big snow" gives to ranch people in the Far West. Indeed, it might be said it was the only time in the year we got any holiday at all, spring, summer, and the Fall, all being very busy times, what with one thing and the other; so that when the

snow did come, although I am bound to say we grumbled much at it, yet in our hearts we were very thankful for the real rest-time it gave us. And we ought not to have grumbled either, for, owing to the exceedingly small rainfall in some of the Western States, it was the snow we looked to to supply the land with moisture and to fill the creeks, which usually "boomed" from the mountains after a heavy fall. So that last week we had been resting. I had mended up all my own clothes and the boys' also: no inconsiderable task when one remembers the havoc that hard work, combined with barb wire fencing, will make in the stoutest of tweeds. And the boys had done their share by cobbling up the boots of the establishment, very clumsily in my humble opinion, but, as they were intensely proud of their job when they had finished it—and had only broken three of our best knives and utterly ruined the family hammer over the business—I knew my place and held my tongue, although I would fain have congratulated them over the nickel a pair they had undoubtedly saved by the transaction. But certainly the early-shut-in evenings were enjoyable; we had heaps of firing and plenty of books, half a frozen beef, a sack of flour, and potatoes, so we were well calculated to stand a siege. The cold at nights was the worst, and the poor animals as well as ourselves suffered bitterly from it. It was quite common for the boys to find the horses shivering under their rugs when they went to give them their hot mash in the mornings; whilst as for my chickens, they would be quite lame and cramped with cold when the morning came, and although I took them some hot bread and milk as soon as I could, their first instinct was, not to peck at it, but to flutter towards the steaming panful, and to press themselves against its warm sides.

It was on a Friday that week, that as I was busy after dinner washing up—indeed, I had nearly finished, and was promising myself a good read before supper—I heard a train bell on the Denver and Rio Grande ringing, and running out to look at it, for the trains always had a certain fascination for me, I saw, much to my amusement, for the track was perfectly clear, and the sky was cloudless, that it was puffing along with its big snow-plough, looking for all the world as if the engine had on a iron pinafore in front of it. I looked ahead and around; it seemed perfectly ridiculous that the train should

burden itself with the snow plough. The sun was shining fiercely and brightly; it was so warm that my cotton blouse felt quite sultry, and I needed nothing round my neck; the sky was of an intense blue, and the snow-covered earth looked very pretty under it, the only break in the continuity of whiteness being the two long tracks of the D. and R. G. and the Santa Fé, one on each side of the shanty, stretching away into distance like two gleaming black snakes, and nearer home, the paths which the boys had cut out to the corral, and creek, and dug-out. Indeed, so warm and sunshiny was it that, my work inside being done, I took my book, and mounting the wood pile, sat and read there, the only drawback being the heat of the sun upon my back. For the rest it was splendid, and I just read on, enjoying the warmth, till one of the boys came up and went into the dairy to hack off a joint from the frozen beef we had hanging up in there for supper. As he returned and drew up a bucket of water to thaw it out in, I called out that the railway men had evidently gone mad, for a train had just passed with its snow plough on. He turned sharply round at this.

"Mad, no; there is generally method in madness of that kind," he exclaimed, shading his eyes with his hands and taking a long look all round. The sky was perfectly clear, only just over the top of Pike's Peak lay the very faintest suspicion of a cloud.

Jack looked at this again and again, and then gave vent to a low whistle.

"It will storm some before morning," he declared. "Old Pike has not got his nightcap on for nothing. How much wood have we got in the shanty?"

"Not very much," I answered. "You know you said you would cut up more to-morrow for the baking. But it's silly thinking we are going to have any more snow, with all this sunshine and beautiful clear sky."

But his only reply was a request that I should get off the wood pile, adding:

"I guess I shall have to spend the rest of the afternoon cutting up ties, and I am afraid you, poor old girl, will have to go round to the corral and milk!"

At this speech I made a grimace, but needs must when a certain person drives, and a few moments saw me, pails in hand, sadly taking my way to the corral in weary anticipation of having eight cows to milk. I never learnt to milk well, and some of the most miserable moments of my life out West were spent with my head, in its

oldest hat, firmly pressed into the side of some old cow brute, who was obstinately refusing to give down her milk. Probably it was as unhappy a time for the unfortunate animal in question as it was for me, and I will say for the boys that they never allowed me to do it when it could be helped; there was no help for it this evening, however, Jack was cutting up ties, and the other boy was out with the waggon in the buck pasture feeding the inside cattle; and I must say as I sat there I could not help feeling a little vexed with Jack. It seemed totally unnecessary under such a sky and sunshine to make a fuss over the wood; we had plenty to last till the morrow, he knew how I hated milking, and it was absurd to take so much notice of a stupid little cloud like the one over the Peak. It was getting chilly, too, by the time I had done with one or two of the cows, and the keen, cold, frosty air began to catch my hands, wet as they were with the warm milk trickling down them into the pail; but I went steadily on exchanging one cow for another, until the best part of my distasteful task was over, never looking up till I heard the waggon coming back at high speed; and then, as I did so, I saw there were little black clouds chasing each other across the sky, and long shadows on the snow where all had been before brilliant sunshine. Presently, too, something stung me on my cheek—it was a bit of sleet—and another and another rattled against the side of the pail. There was no mistake about the matter now, it was going to storm after all.

The boys were confabbing together. I could hear their voices, and presently they came up and sent me indoors. I ran up to the shanty, drying my unfortunate hands as I went, and found Jack had cut a huge pile of wood whilst I had been milking, but had not had time to take it in; and as the sleet was coming down slowly still, and the clouds gathering overhead, I set to work and stored the cut-up logs under the shelf in the outer kitchen. Then I made up a good fire and set on the kettle for supper, lit the lamp, pulled the crimson curtains across the windows, and went outside to have another look at the weather. There was no sleet now, and very little wind, but the snow had begun, and was falling silently in large flakes; the wood pile was already whitened over, and so were the shingles of the roof, but the little shanty itself looked quite warm and cosy with the red glow from the curtained windows; so

as I still heard the boys busy in the corral, I went in and proceeded to get supper ready. The beef in the pail of water had quite thawed out by this time, but there was a coating of ice on the top of the water which made the taking of it out a very cold business indeed. Then I cut some up with potatoes and onions to stew for the morrow's breakfast, and cut the rest into slices to fry with bacon and potatoes for supper, the beef being so lean that a little bacon was a great improvement to it. Next I put an apple tart into the oven; made a little hot biscuit, of which the boys were very fond; and put the coffee and milk on to boil; and just then Jack rushed in and declared they would be in to supper in ten minutes, and asked if I had a ball of string—English string, for the stuff we got in the little city was apt to break easily.

"Only one ball left," I replied, a little grudgingly, for I wanted to keep it for parcels, and I knew that if the boys once got it out in the corral I stood a very poor chance of ever seeing my ball again. "Supper won't be ready for half an hour, however, Jack, for I have been busy getting the wood indoors."

"There's a good girl," was the reply. "I was afraid we should have that little job to do after supper, and you can bet your bottom dollar it's going to snow all it knows how to-night. Got any pitch-pine in for kindling?"

"Everything," I answered proudly; "look at this!"

And my improvised wood pile evidently met with great approval; even the fact that supper would be half an hour late sank into insignificance, and the boys went in quite contentedly to have a wash and wait till the meal should be ready for them.

We did not sit long over supper that night, although as a rule we were in the habit of doing so, the work of the day being mostly over by that time; but to-night every one seemed to live in anticipation—and, to judge by the boys' faces, a by no means pleasant anticipation either—of what might be coming.

All was very silent and hushed round the shanty; there seemed to be no sounds in the air except when the passing trains on one or another of the railway tracks rushed past with a wild shriek and a long trail of flaming smoke behind it, for all the world as if the trains were running a race with something. They had, every one of them, their snow ploughs on, and whirled away

east and west at a far more rapid pace than usual, the engines giving defiant snorts, the forces of civilisation arrayed for battle against the forces of nature, and trusting that old dame would not be too strong for them this time. After supper we all went and stood at the door looking out upon the track. The snow had actually cleared off a bit, and a flickering moon was up, the rails gleaming brightly here and there in the unsteady light.

Presently, with much ringing of its bell, and hooting of its cattle horn, the six-thirty came along on the Santa Fé track, the engine belching out a long trail of fire and smoke behind it, and dropping red-hot cinders along the line as it went; to our surprise, however, it slowed down on passing the ranch, and we saw a black object suddenly projected from one of the cars on to the bank, then the train, for it was a freight one, got up speed, and steamed swiftly away.

"Some poor brute who could not pay his fare been 'fired,' I guess," said Jack. "We shan't escape this time, the ranch is far too near the track for that; and, hang it all," he cried, with some energy, "I wouldn't turn a dog out on such a night as this is going to be."

And, sure enough, the black heap got up, shook itself, and made for us at once. There was no help for it, as the boys had said, we were bound to provide food and shelter, so they gave him a gruff welcome—we did not stand much on ceremony out West—and I took him in and got some fresh supper, and put the blankets upon the extra bed in the boys' room. For our little shanty only consisted of four rooms, two small and two larger, one of the last being the boys' room and the other the kitchen, whilst the two smaller were mine and the little sitting-room used chiefly on Sundays. There was also a lean-to at the back which made an outer kitchen, and where, in the summer, we kept the cooking stove. Presently the boys, who had been down to the corral, came in, and reported all was safe for the night, and then they had a smoke with the stranger, who turned out to be a fellow-countryman, hailing from Alabama, stony broke, and counting the ties in search of work; but he looked quite personable after a wash and brush-up. I left them to their smokes and went off to bed, where I was soon sleeping soundly, for I was very tired, faintly hearing the boys open the door and take a look at the weather the last thing. However, I only slept soundly at first, all the night

seemed disturbed with strange sounds; the wind howled and tore round the shanty, once a shingle came whirling down off the roof, and all the night through something soft kept sweeping and swashing against the window. When I woke I felt as if I had overslept myself, and yet the little room was almost dark; but I heard the boys' voices in the kitchen as they started, as I thought, the stove, and I knew it must be getting time to get up. Presently came a determined knock at my door, and a voice enquiring if I "knew what time it was?" And on my answering sleepily that I supposed it to be somewhere about six, I heard, to my utter astonishment, that it had gone nine, and that there was some hot water and a cup of coffee waiting outside my door. I hastily slipped on my dressing-gown and lit a candle, for it was still very dark, and enquired, as I took the water in, what was the matter.

"Matter? A blizzard is the matter, old girl," was Jack's response. "Get up at once; you never saw such a sight in your life. And, I say, we want some breakfast."

"All right," I replied, "I won't be long. You are a good boy to make some coffee. Stick the porridge and beef stew on the stove, will you?"

And I eagerly looked out, and in the intervals of dressing, flattened my nose against the window-pane, but there was nothing to be seen, except what looked, as far as I could tell, like whirling masses of darkness. I had often heard and been told of blizzards and the harm they did, but this was the first time we had any of us experienced one, and I wondered what we should do and how we should get on. Evidently the trains were not running, for nothing rushed past shaking the little shanty, and no cattle horns or bells were to be heard; all was stillness and a sort of heavy darkness. No coyotes were to be heard either, nothing but the wind howling round and lashing itself against the house. How thankful I was now, that Jack had insisted upon cutting up that wood the night before, and that we had so much food in the place, for I had heard that these storms sometimes lasted for days; and then I thought how far more thankful our unbidden guest must be that he was safe under shelter in such weather as this. By this time I was dressed, and went into the kitchen, not unpleasantly excited, but found the boys looking grave enough. It was no joke to them, poor fellows, they knew full well the damage such a storm

was likely to do amongst the outside cattle on the range, and quite half of ours had been turned out that winter; there was never a blizzard but some harm came to the cow brutes, and as they had invested a good deal of their capital on the animals, it meant an anxious time. Even if the "inside" cattle were lucky enough to escape all ill effects, some of those turned out on the range were sure to come to grief, although the full extent of the mischief done would never be known till the snow cleared off and it was time for the spring "round-ups."

The lamp was lit, and, after a fashion, the breakfast-table laid, so we proceeded to take that meal, but it was a very solemn quartette that sat down to it, and when it was over we all made for the door and looked out again at the weather. For me, I had never seen such a sight, if sight it could be called, for all was a sort of grey blackness; even the wood pile, which was only ten feet from the door, could only be distinguished as a shapelessness of denser blackness, whilst all the other outbuildings, which were close to the shanty, had altogether disappeared from human eye; the air itself was full of soft whirling masses of very fine snow, which the wind drove before it, moaning and shrieking round every corner of the house as it did so; and struck by a sudden thought, I exclaimed, "Oh, where is the dairy, Jack?—nearly all the food is there!" to which he responded drily, that he supposed they would have to try and dig it out presently, but that they must get to the corral and attend to the cattle first. However, our visitor came to the rescue then, and suggested he should try and dig out a path to it. Needless to say we were only too glad to accept his offer, only the difficulty was to find out where the dairy really was; there was nothing to be seen beyond arm's length, and it seemed so ridiculous to go groping for it when one knew that all the time the building was only a couple of hundred yards away. As for finding the corral, which was still further, the boys had taken the precaution overnight to tie one end of the ball of string to the gate of it, and the other end to one of the posts of the well, which stood under shelter just outside the kitchen door; and armed with buckets, they floundered across the snow, for come what might, the crack of doom itself, the Western cow brute must be attended to. The dairy being fortunately on the way to the corral, they escorted our friend and his spade and



lantern so far, leaving me alone in the shanty, in the middle of the thick greyness that looked to me like the end of all things.

I turned indoors to see what work could be done in my department, feeling very strange and eerie, a feeling which the sight of the lamplit breakfast-table did not tend to disperse. However, at some stages life will not bear thinking about, the only safety is to get up and find something to do; so I set to work, and presently, as I saw cups and saucers in their usual places in the cupboard, and the kitchen tidied up, I felt better; but when all the work of the little shanty was done, and I sat down by the stove, the heavy atmosphere began to depress me again. All the stories I had ever read or heard of blizzards crowded into my memory to keep each other company. Stories of ruined ranchmen, whose dead cattle were found piled up in heaps when the snow had melted; stories of cowboys overtaken on the prairies by the treacherous snowstorm, and found, long days after, with coyote-eaten bodies. Stories of starved folk whose food was in dug-outs, not twenty yards from their shanty, and yet could not be found. Stories of trains, blizzard-bound in deep cuttings, where no food or succour could be obtained. All these and many others surged into my brain, and amongst them a peculiarly horrible one about a young couple in a lonely shanty. How the man had gone out, as my boys had just now, to find his way to the corral, and how the snow had come down faster than ever, wrapping the shanty round and round so that he never found his way home; and how the poor young wife stood at the door, the lamp in her hand, calling to him again and again to let him know where the house was. How at first, for some time, came answering calls, and she shrilly shouted on and on, hoping and hoping, till at last there came no answering cry in return to hers; and how friends, coming afterwards to look them up, found the stiffened corpse of a man not a hundred yards from his own door, and inside the shanty a mad girl continually wailing out her husband's name. This was so cheering that I jumped up and set to work again, until my nerves quieted down, giving place to a matter-of-fact feeling of satisfaction that, despite the blizzard, the duties of the day were being got steadily through. Several times I went to the door and looked out. The wind had abated a little, although the snow still fell, and it was not perceptibly lighter, but I could hear now the cattle in the corral;

that seemed almost like company! Twelve o'clock struck. In half an hour it would be dinner-time, but where the dinner would be unless the dairy was dug out, I could not say, and yet those poor boys would be quite done up, and so hungry! So I went to the pantry to see what I had in the house. Meat there was none, but I had a ham destined for a Christmas treat, and some eggs, there was also bread and jam, and as I felt the day required something extra, I opened a can of sweet-corn and put it on to stew with a little butter, pepper, and salt. It was not, however, till two o'clock that they came in, up to their eyes in snow, and perfectly breathless and spent with floundering through it. All the cattle were safe, and the horses also. Our new chum had got at the dairy, so we had plenty of food, and when the animals had been looked to again after dinner, we shut up for the night after a last look round.

It was only a quarter to four, but it was now pitch-dark, thick darkness, "a darkness that could be felt," I murmured, remembering a sentence in a certain old book as the fine powdery snow whirled round us. All train traffic had ceased, and there was silence everywhere; except for certain muffled sounds from the corral, all was silence and darkness. And then we shut the door and settled down rather silently for a long evening, until our new chum started us singing, and Jack, who rather fancied himself on the banjo, got down that instrument and treated us to some of his finest efforts in the musical line. But there was a great treat in store for us when it came to the stranger's turn, for he possessed a very good tenor voice, and anything like his singing of plantation songs I have seldom heard. We listened entranced to "In the Old Kentucky Home," with its plaintive refrain of "Hard times, hard times, hard times come again no more," and we felt balls in our throat over "Way down upon the Swanee Ribber." It clearly would not do to think too much of the "old folks at home" that night. In my mind's eye rose the vision of a warm and lighted room, and well-known faces round the tea-table. I could even see the bits of geranium and heliotrope in the flower vases, and hear the merry chatter over nothing at all that went on at that time. But I awoke to the contemplation of a deal table and a smoky lamp, three bearded men fiercely sucking at their pipes and gazing vacantly at the alabastined log

walls of the shanty. This would never do. I felt like Mark Tapley that now or never was the time to be jolly, and begged our new friend to sing something cheerful, whereupon he plunged into the following plantation ditty, which I jotted down, as I had never heard it before, and never have since :

Oh, it's dashing and a-splashing of the steamboat wheels,

Fo' I am boun' to go ;

An' it's clar the decks fo' who comes next

To de lan' whar de cotton tree grow.

To de lan', to de lan',

Fo' de tide is rising fast, an' de boat is off at last,

An' de gentlemen are drinking down below.

Oh, it's pulling an' a-pulling at de rope from de bank,

Fo' I am boun' to go ;

An' it's haulin' an' a-squalling at the gangway plank,

In de lan' whar de cotton tree grow.

In de lan', in de lan',

Fo' de tide is rising fast, an' de bar will soon be past,

An' de gentlemen are drinking down below.

When I come to the dock about one o'clock,

Whar I am boun' to go,

My true love she will stan', with her bonnet in her hand,

In de lan' whar de cotton tree grow.

In de lan', in de lan',

I oh, de tide is rising fast, an' de boat is off at last,

An' de gentlemen are drinking down below.

The tune of this plantation ditty had the customary plaintiveness and brightness of the usual negro songs, turning quickly into vivacity whenever the occupation of the gentlemen "down below" was mentioned in the refrain, and the air itself was so catching that we went to bed with it ringing in our ears. The boys raked out and relaid the stove ready for the morning, and conveyed the oven shelf, neatly wrapped in an old blanket, into my room for me to sleep upon, for I felt the cold bitterly at nights; and the last thing I heard as I sank to sleep was Jack's voice—the dear fellow had not much idea of tune—growling out :

For de tide is rising fast,

An' de boat is off at last,

An' de gentlemen are drinking down below.

And then I fell asleep, and slept, I do not know how long, but when I awoke it was to see bright sunshine streaming into the room—the dreadful blizzard was over. I peeped into the kitchen; the stove was "going" bravely, coffee was boiling, and an egg put handy to follow its example, the table was covered with the débris of an impromptu breakfast, and the clock was striking nine. I had slept it round, that was certain, and the boys, instead of waking me, had got their own breakfast and gone out, so I seized upon the tin kettle and soon made my toilet, and rushed to the kitchen door, whence I gazed out upon the

world in astonishment; not so much that all was snow, but that all the familiar landmarks had disappeared. Where was the dug-out; where were the dairy and fowl-house? Where, to go further afield, was the railway track? The only things that stood out from the universal white counterpane which covered the earth, were the telegraph poles that ran alongside of the Denver and Rio Grande, and even of these one or two were broken down. As for the whiteness of the scene, no words of mine can describe it; it hurt the eyes, and for a moment or two after I returned to the kitchen I suffered from snow-blindness.

It was sunny and warm enough outside in the bright sunshine; the great peaks of the Rockies stood out against an intense blue sky; the pine-trees up the sides of the foot-hills were loaded down with snow; yet, when the sun uncovered that peaceful-looking expanse what tragedies of man and beast might not be brought to light, what untold tales of suffering and want might not have been inflicted by the blizzard that had just swept over the prairie? And to return to ourselves, what loss of capital might not have overtaken us? I dreaded to think of it all; so many of our friends had, we knew from past tales, lost almost their little all at such times. What might not fate have in store for us when the springtime came? No one had given us very cheering accounts of ranching in that part of the Great West, and yet it meant so much to us that we should get on and do well, which seemed almost impossible in the face of the fact that others with far more experience had gone stony broke, or only made just enough to grub on from day to day in a hand-to-mouth fight for existence. Not but what I thought, and think still, that one could have made a decent enough living out of the ranch, but we all wanted to make our pile and go home and spend it. We were all young and wanted to make money quickly, and it was not at all the place for that, a rougher life further West would have been better; but still we had bought the ranch, selling it again would, we found already, be a very different matter. For many of the settlers round, however, who came of the class of the English agricultural labourer who had emigrated whilst young, the place was simply a little earthly paradise. They had meat—butter's meat—three times a day; they had cattle to milk, and horses to ride; their numerous sons and daughters

were no more burdens and helpless mouths to be fed, but embryo ranch hands and milk-maids, each capable on reaching a certain age of taking up land and adding thus to the family estate. Jack was as good as his master, and perhaps a little better, whilst every girl had the chance of settling down in life, as she would, for women were fairly scarce, and much needed for housekeepers. But for Englishmen of another class, the place was "played out"; what money there was in was no longer counted by dollars, but saved carefully cent by cent. Some of the people round made money by what they were pleased to call taking pupils, in which case a man paid a certain sum a year, and his son was allowed the free run of the ranch, and the privilege of milking and ploughing, with the glory of 'loping round several square miles of prairie on a bucking cowpony, equipped in all the bravery of leathern shapps, cowboy's hat, gloves and whip, with a brand-new lariat neatly coiled round the horn of his Mexican saddle. Such a fate we found our new friend's had been. His people in England had paid for him for a year, and at the end of the time there was no work to be had; he had been on the wander ever since, working in the summer, and living Heaven knows how through the bitter winter months, and in his pride sending letters home at intervals to say how well he was getting on. He spoke of moving that evening, and asked a little diffidently if we had any work to give him. Alas, there was none, but for the time he could stay and help repair the damage done to the fencing by the blizzard; some of the shingles, too, had been blown off the roof of the shanty. As for the cattle, one of the cows in the buck pasture had fallen down, and been so cruelly treated by its companions that it had to be shot. We felt we were lucky so far that it was only one, but some of our neighbours had not been so fortunate, and each day brought in some fresh tale of disaster to men or cattle. Of course the harm of what had happened on the range was not known for many a day after; when we did know our full loss, we looked back with horror on the blizzard. Long before that, however, our strange guest had "moved on," and we never saw or heard anything more of him. He promised to write, and I think would have done so had he anything pleasant to tell. But he drifted out of our lives as he had drifted into them one winter's day, and we saw the last of him

on the Santa Fé track just before it rounded the curve, a shabby figure in grey with his bundle on his back, waving an equally shabby cowboy's hat in a mute farewell.

## TWO WEST INDIAN AMAZONS.

AMONG the numerous romances which have been located in the West Indies, it is doubtful if there be any more striking than the true stories of the lives of two real women—Anne Bonney and Mary Read, whose very names are now almost forgotten in Jamaica itself. The career of each of these women was remarkable enough separately; but what was still more remarkable was the manner in which their fates became interjoined.

The story takes us back to the days of the picaroons and buccaneers, whose doings have inspired so many romancists, and the facts of whose lives were, perhaps, not less strange than the fictions that have been woven out of them.

Notable in the spacious harbour of Port Royal, Jamaica, is a verdant promontory known as Gallows Point, so called because it was the place on which so many of the sea-robbers of old met their doom at the hand of outraged law. There numberless picaroons and buccaneers have expiated their crimes; the picaroon being the rascal on the large and unblushing scale, while the buccaneer—at first, at any rate—had a colourable pretext for existence in a sort of chartered privilege to rob the Spaniards as much as possible. In fact the buccaneer was an ostensible trader before he degenerated into a pirate. The celebrated Morgan belonged to this persuasion—he, the poor Welsh boy, who, after escaping from slavery in Barbados, became one of the boldest "privateers" of the seventeenth century, who attacked Panama, pillaged the place of enormous treasure, was knighted for his success there, and was afterwards appointed Governor of Jamaica. A very different fate befell, in later times, other buccaneers; but it is to be remembered of Morgan that he did not practise the cruelties only too common in his profession.

One of the most notorious of the picaroons was Blackbeard, whose body was destined to decorate Gallows Point. Another, scarcely less celebrated in his day, was Captain Rackham, who ended his career on a gibbet on a coral islet near Jamaica, thereafter known as Rackham Cay—Cay being a

word of Spanish derivation, frequently applied in the West Indies to small islands. And it is concerning this picaresque of Rackham Cay that our story has to do.

Captain Rackham had run short of hands, and, in fact, seems to have been in rather reduced circumstances generally, when, in 1720, he put into Negril Bay in the hope of picking up recruits. There he invited on board some nine of the crew of a French fishing-boat, and was regaling them with rum punch, when a British pirate-chaser hove round the point. Rackham slipped his anchor and made sail with the nine fishermen on board. He was captured, however, brought into Port Royal, tried at an Admiralty Assizes, and condemned to be hung, along with eight of his own crew. The Frenchmen were tried later for "constructive piracy"—that is, aiding and abetting a notorious pirate—and they also were hanged. But there were two other persons on board the pirate vessel who also came up for trial with the picaresques, and who only escaped sentence by disclosing themselves as women. These women were Anne Bonney and Mary Read.

Anne Bonney was the wife of Captain Rackham, and well suited she was to be a pirate's bride. Her father had been an Irish attorney, who deserted a wife and family in Cork and eloped to South Carolina with a servant-girl, whom he there married. He made a fortune as a planter, and Anne—the daughter of the servant-girl—was much courted by the young planters of Carolina, both for the money that would be hers and for her good looks. But she loved a sailor, and having married him against her father's orders, was banished from the parental roof. The young couple made their way to New Providence, the gathering place at that time of all discontented beings, and Anne, to accustom herself to a life of adventure, put on man's clothes.

At first she lived with her child on one of the outer islands while Captain Rackham roamed the seas; but by-and-by she shipped with him as one of the crew, and accompanied him in all his depredations. She was, in fact, accounted the most courageous and fearless of the ship's company, and she was the last to yield at the capture off Negril Bay above related. It is said that when allowed to visit her husband to say good-bye before he was led to the scaffold, her parting words were a rebuke—that had he but fought like a man before he was taken, he would not have been led away to be hanged like a dog.

The story of Mary Read is still more romantic. Her mother was an English girl who, when very young, married a sailor belonging to a good family. He went off once on a voyage from which he never returned, leaving her with one little boy-child. She was not faithful to his memory, and a girl-child was born to her, but to conceal the fact from her husband's family, she repaired to a distant part of the country for two or three years. There the legitimate boy died, and she was driven to the expedient of passing off the illegitimate girl in his place. Thus it was that Mary Read was first dressed in those male garments that she was destined to wear during most of her life.

Mary was presented to her mother's mother-in-law, and accepted by her as her grandson. So long as the grandmother lived there was an allowance of five shillings a week for the child, but, when the old lady died, Mary had to work for a living. She took a situation as foot-boy, or page, with a French lady, and in that capacity travelled a good deal. Tiring of service she tried the sea for a time, but abandoned that for soldiering during the war in Flanders.

First she joined an infantry regiment, but soon changed into the cavalry, and fought splendidly under Marlborough. The fortune of war sent her a comrade in the shape of a good-looking young Flemish soldier, with whom she fell violently in love. It was a delicate matter to make known her sex and her sentiments, but her woman's wit rose above her garb, and the two were publicly married by the regimental chaplain. Their romantic story brought them a shower of money presents, with which they started an inn. But the Fleming did not live long, and Mary, finding business not a congenial occupation, sold up the concern, disguised herself once more, and re-entered the army. She fought at Ramillies and Oudenarde and Malplaquet, and only gave up the pursuit of military glory when the peace of Utrecht disbanded the forces. By that time she was a very expert swordswoman.

Cut off from soldiering, and having as little inclination as ever for humdrum occupations, Mary determined to try the sea again. She booked as a sailor on board of a Dutch vessel bound for the West Indies. There the ship was taken by pirates, and she, being English, was asked to join the fraternity known as the "Brethren of the Coast." She was quite ready and willing. She had become accustomed to a sea life; she loved adventure; and, though gentle-hearted, was not much troubled with conscience.



So she shipped under Captain Rackham as a picaroon, and now a strange thing happened. Anne, the Captain's disguised wife, fell in love with the good-looking new hand, and sought "his" society so much as to make Rackham furiously jealous. Anne, in confidence, told Read that she was a woman, whereupon Mary had to make a similar confession! It was a queer position, but after an exchange of experiences, the two girls agreed to tell the Captain, as his jealousy was becoming too serious. Captain Rackham was the only person on board who knew that two of his "hands" were women.

It is said that he was, even before he knew her sex, somewhat puzzled that one so quiet and gentle-looking as Mary Read should have voluntarily enlisted with pirates, and one day asked her why she continued to run the risk of a felon's death. She said it was because all pirates were brave, and that courageous men have to starve on shore. "To my choice," she is reported to have said, "the penalty for a pirate's life should not be less than death, for it is the fear of a felon's death that keeps dastardly men out of the service. Those ashore who cheat widows and rob orphans, and are just bold enough to oppress their neighbours because they are too poor to seek justice, would be robbing at sea. A crowd of rogues would be plundering if pillage had no dangers; merchants would be deterred from venturing a valuable cargo afloat; free-booting would be a trade not worth following. The rewards of piracy are only for the brave!"

Such were the reputed sentiments of this remarkable person, who clearly knew what she was about when she elected to sail under the "Jolly Roger."

But even under the Black Flag the little god may throw his darts, and it came to pass that one day Captain Rackham's company received an addition in the person of a handsome young carpenter. He was one of the crew of a "prize," and he elected, like Mary, to throw in his lot with the pirates, who were truly glad to have him, since carpenters were not very plentiful in "the service," and it was often difficult enough to effect repairs. Mary at once fell over head and ears in love with him, and she did a desperate thing in order to secure his attention.

One day there was a quarrel among the crew, which ended in one of them challenging the carpenter to fight a duel. Mary knew that such encounters always ended in the death of one of the com-

batants, and she determined to prevent her beloved from fighting. So she deliberately insulted his challenger before the whole ship's company, and on being challenged in turn, insisted that the last insult should be wiped out before the first. As a cavalry soldier she had acquired remarkable skill with the sword, and she knew that she was superior to any ordinary antagonist. She met her man, she fought, and after a few passes ran him through and laid him dead at her feet.

This exploit naturally led to explanations with the carpenter, with the result that they became man and wife. Thus were there two married couples on board this strange pirate craft, and nobody knew of the fact but the two couples themselves!

Not only that, but these two women pirates were the most adventurous and courageous members of the whole crew. There was little of the woman about either of them, but Mary Read was the more womanly and sentimentally inclined of the two. She was probably also the more emotional, as she was also the more deep in her affections.

They were both condemned along with the rest of the pirate gang, but were reprieved on their sex being made known. Mary Read died in her cell soon afterwards. For Anne Bonney intercession was made by influential colonists who had known her father, and who remembered her in her innocent girlhood. She was released and her subsequent history is unrecorded. It is said that she showed no emotion at the execution of her husband, whose body was hung in chains on Rackham Cay, along with his two chief officers, as a terror to all free-booters. After ornamenting Rackham Cay for a couple of years, the gibbet was swept away in the great hurricane of 1722, and on a portion of the wreck of the scaffold a negro, who had been washed overboard from one of the vessels in the harbour, floated ashore.

Thus the last use of the notorious pirate was to save a life after his own death!

Since then all trace of Rackham and his companions has disappeared, and the name is only known to navigators of our time as indicating one of the landmarks in making Port Royal. What became of the children of these two remarkable couples is not recorded. In 1822 the capture of the notorious "Zaragonaza," with her desperate crew of ruffians commanded by Aragonéz, marked the end of buccaneering and picarooning in these waters. On that occasion the gibbet on Gallows Point was extended to hold sixteen freebooters in a row.

## THE SEA-GULL.

THE pale, pathetic sunshine on park and pleasure lay.  
 Where Whatton stood serene and proud in the soft November day;  
 The fragile roses lingering upon each drooping stalk,  
 Guarded, with purple heather bell, the ordered garden walk.  
 And where the water shimmered, beneath the yellowing tree,  
 Upon his rock the sea-gull sate dreaming of the sea.  
 From Leicestershire's fair uplands, from his sheltered inland home,  
 His spirit flew where wide and wild tossed the broad leagues of foam.  
 He saw the glitter of the surge flash from the rolling waves,  
 He heard the breakers thundering, deep in the rocky caves,  
 He saw the cliff side, grim and stern, where he so fain would be,  
 The lonely sea-gull on the rock, still dreaming of the sea.  
 He heard the "shouting" of the birds that from the eyrie swept,  
 With whirr and swoop of broad grey wings, where their prey below them leapt;  
 Above the lavish food they brought, the keen, black eyes grew dim;  
 The stately swan that glided by was never mate for him;  
 Better the wildest ocean storm, than the sunniest land-locked lea;  
 So on his rock the sea-gull stood dreaming of the sea.

## MOLLIE AHEARNE.

## A COMPLETE STORY.

OF all the robes woven at the silent looms of God to clothe the round world withal, I love the royal purple of the heather best; and nowhere does it grow in such glory of beauty as where Corrin Hill slopes down to the village of Gurteen and the great Atlantic. There it seems to tumble down the hillside in billows that sweep over and around the red projecting rocks, and only now and then you get a glimpse of the golden gorse, where it lifts its head above the gorgeous flood; while the big bells of crimson-purple and the little bells of lilac, whispering to each other in the sun the secrets the west wind brings in from the sea, make for your ears all the music of rushing water. There is white heather, too, if you know where to look for it; little Mollie Ahearne showed me where it was when I was a boy and she a barefooted child. She knew every stone on the hill, I think, for she lived in the cottage you can make out from the sea, nestling near the top in a sharp hollow like some giant heel-mark. And it is her story I would tell.

She lived with her uncle—or grand-uncle, rather—old Shamus Ahearne, who had saved money, they said, and would rather die than spend a farthing of it. He was a

cross old man, with a hard word for everybody, except Mollie, and a universal distrust of men and things, that seemed to his neighbours to be a sign of comparative sympathy with the Evil One. I remember he would come to the door of his cottage when I passed, and shake his great black-thorn stick at me, just for the sake of shaking it at something. That was the ethical code which he adopted; he was always shaking his stick, literally or metaphorically, at something. Only one class of society escaped this almost all-inclusive brandishing, and that was the priesthood of his creed. Before that he bowed his surly old head, and for its welfare he was even ready, comparatively ready, to give some of his hoardings, and when the parish priest held a "station" at the hillside cottage, Owld Shamus celebrated a sort of church festival. Things were done in style, I can tell you, on these occasions. There wasn't a curate then, even, that had to sit on a kitchen chair, or to feed himself with a steel fork. No; he would hire the horse-hair chairs from the bedrooms in Flynn's hotel, and the brassy forks the worthy Peter Flynn called his "silver."

"'Deed, ye'd think," Ned Gallagher, the stone-breaker, once said to me, "ye'd think 'twas the way owld Shamus had two sows to save, 'stead av wan little kanawn av a thing that the divil himsilf would hardly miss!"

I never could quite make out why he adopted his grand-niece; perhaps she saved him a servant. He liked her in a queer, crabbed way of his own, I used to think; but afterwards it seemed that she was only a useful article to him, an investment of capital that was to repay the outlay by contributing to the saving of his soul; for Mollie was destined to be given to the holy sisterhood. All his money was to go with her, and surely, if he bestowed such a gift upon a pious institution, there would be no lack of masses for his soul. But he put off the time when he should make his unselfish offering, partly, I think, because of the personal inconvenience her absence would entail, and partly, perhaps, because the girl showed less than no predisposition for the vocation. Not that she wasn't as good as gold; you couldn't meet her big grey eyes without knowing that; and from the time she was a slip of a colleen, playing "Hunt the Fox" with Con Ronan and Teddy Coyne and the rest round the whitewashed school-house in the village, she never missed mass of a Sunday morning or saint's

day. This, no doubt, was in part the doing of the crafty old man, yet I still remember her demure, downcast eyes, so different from the merry girl of weekdays, when I would meet her coming from first mass on my way to church. She had the intensely religious temperament of her race, and was very emphatically Irish; half her religion was superstition, and superstition half her religion. But she had no leaning towards life in a convent. I think, indeed, she was in such awe of the holy sisters that the idea filled her with a sort of terror.

She was but a slim girl of twenty when Con Ronan wanted to marry her. He was a big fellow, five or six years her senior, with crisp black hair growing thickly on his small head, and keen, dark blue eyes. "A fine figure av a man, glory be to God, an' divil another in it to bate him," was the universal opinion. But Con wasn't prosperous. He had a boat of his own in the bay, and he was the most daring of all fishermen, but he never took to anything seriously—except, perhaps, poaching. His chiefest friend was Teddy Coyne, a merry soul, who loved to join in the expeditions up the Brusna, that emptied itself into the ocean at the east end of the village, to "stroke-haul" a salmon with the murderous three-hooks in some quiet pool, or make the pheasants drunk with corn steeped in whisky. Con made these expeditions with an eye to business as well as sport, but Teddy only went, as he said himself, "for blackguardin'," for his father was a well-to-do farmer. They both had known Mollie Ahearne since their childhood, but, as time went on, "Black Con," as he was called, grew to think more of her than anything else—"even than a spring salmon," mourned Teddy to me, rubbing his red hair disconsolately.

Teddy would have offered his own silly, true heart and freckled hand to the girl if his hero had not taken the field before he contemplated it very seriously. As it was, his one thought was to further Con's wooing and establish him in the good graces of old Shamus; and to do this he would turn in of an evening to the old man and his niece, and sit by the hearth, launching out into high-flown eulogium of his friend.

"Deed now, 'tis he's the steady boy," he'd say, ignoring the fact that they had got a couple of brace of hares the night before; "I'm tellin' ye, Mistor Ahearne, sor, ye'll see him taxt-gatherer, or wather-bailiff, or some of thim things before he stops. The likes av him is great!" And

he would screw up all his face into a knowing, surreptitious wink at Mollie, while Shamus grunted sceptically.

After a few such visits as these it dawned on the old man that things were taking an unexpected turn with regard to his niece, and, after much brooding, he broached the subject one night. Mollie was kneading dough to bake bread in the "bastable" that stood by the hearth, with its broad flat cover ready to be piled up with glowing turf, hanging by it, and he was crouching under the great open chimney with his faithful blackthorn in his hand as usual. He was parted from it only when he was asleep, I believe; for, when it wasn't actually supporting him, he punctuated his frequent tirades with blows on the floor and virulent flourishes.

"Who's makin' a match fur ye wid that Ronan?" he asked suddenly.

The rolling-pin stopped short in its swift journeying across the deal table to the wall and back, and Mollie looked hard at the solitary candle that stood next her.

"No one," she said at last, putting back a lock of dark hair that had strayed over her forehead.

"Well thin," said Shamus, puffing at his pipe, with his head held high to keep the embers he had collected from falling out, "Teddy Coyne have a dale av talk about the same man, an' he have ivery look at you an' he saying it. I'm thinkin' there's been somethin' goin' on about ye."

The rolling-pin, that had begun to ply again, stopped half-way to the wall, and two small hands tightened on it. Mollie drew her breath quickly, and gathered courage to say what she had foreseen long since with dread she must some day say. Shamus went on with his pipe calmly enough, but scowling at the fire. His suspicions had been quite dispelled, for Mollie never told him a lie, and, to him, there was no such thing as marriage without a prolonged bout of match-making. Mollie knew well that her answer had satisfied him, that the thing she had to say would come quite unexpectedly, and that the storm it would raise would be twice as bad on that account.

"Con Ronan wants me to marry him——"

"He does? He does that?" cried Shamus, starting round. "Who towlt it t'ye?"

"He did hisself."

"The divil carry his impidence," snarled the old man, thumping the hearthstone with his stick.

"An' I want to marry him," said Mollie, facing round; "an' I'll never have no one else," she added, taking advantage of the speechless astonishment on her uncle's face, and turning again to her work, she sent the rolling-pin on its way to and fro once more. But Shamus soon found his voice, and stood up to scream and stamp his stick at her. She was a bold, brazen piece, he shouted, and had no more gratitude than—than a pipe-stem—and he'd see her stretched for waking on the table before he'd let her marry such rubbish. He hobbled up and down the kitchen, scolding and abusing at the top of his thin voice, striking the earthen floor from time to time as if to ram home his vituperation; and at last, telling her he'd see her married to a good match before the month was out, he left the room still scolding; and Mollie bowed her little dark head on the hard deal table, and sobbed her sorrow out to the Holy Mother.

There were sad days after that. Shamus set about making a match for his niece in earnest, and determined that if he could not present her as an offering of his own to the convent in Bantry, he must at least connect himself, by her marriage, with the priesthood. He had a vague notion, judging all mankind by his own warped and stunted standard, that he would in some way reap spiritual benefit by the transaction.

"There's Father Clancy," he pondered, as he started forth the next morning, "he have a little owld brother, goin' into the town av Banthry, wid niver a cross in the world to buy a bag av male or a thing, widout axing for the loan av it. Sure, if I make the match wid his riverince, the man would be outlawed intirely if he wouldn't say a handful av masses fur me sowl—God have mercy on me—after he knowin' 'twas I sot up the brother wid the gurl an' the fortune!"

And with these reflections he trudged to the neighbouring parish and spent a long day in the priest's bleak little parlour, throwing out crafty insinuations, and hinting that his niece was as good as promised to another—"a fine steady lump av a man, too"—but that it was his pious wish that his savings should, however indirectly, benefit the true Church and her sacred ministry; until the good priest wondered how such a self-denying piety could have lain dormant so long, and took his simple soul to task for setting down his visitor as the greatest hypocrite in the four parishes. However, Shamus must have been satisfied with his day's work, for, on his way home in the

evening, he overtook Judy Callaghan, on the bog road, walking behind a high-piled load of turf.

"Begob, he's mortal strong wid ye!" cried he, eyeing the emaciated nine-months-old donkey that staggered slowly along amid the odds and ends of rope that kept him between a shaft and a half.

"Arrah, what is he but a little foaleen?" said Judy, laboriously slewing him round to avoid a hole in the road by hauling the stumpy back-shaft in the opposite direction; "but he's the show to pull, for all. Hi, off, ye devil!" she added, bending to her work until the baby donkey, patiently crossing his tiny hoofs, was borne sideways across the road. "There's a lag there," she said, glancing back at the hole she had avoided successfully; "who is it have the mendin' av this bit av road?"

"Tis Clancy—James Clancy—ma'am," answered Shamus, a trifle loftily, "over-right Horan's forge, goin' in the town av Banthry."

"Och! the little owld tinker! I know him well. 'Tis matchmakin' fur hissself that fello' is all his time, an' ne'er a wan av them will go to him. Fittier fur him throw his hand over a shevel an' scatter a thrashecawn av stones on roads that's killing the people!"

And Judy snorted as she stooped for a good black sod that had fallen from her load.

"I'd be tellin' ye, ma'am," said Shamus, nettled, "that the same man is gittin' a gurl an' a handy bit av fortune shortly. Maybe that'll knock the blatherin' out o' ye!"

And putting in the note of exclamation with a bang of his stick on the ground, he quickened his pace to leave her.

"Arrah, who is it, Shamus, alay?" cried Judy coaxingly after him.

"Maybe I'd be tellin' ye, indeed!" sniffed Shamus over his shoulder, and walked on. But before he went twenty yards further, his news grew too burdensome for him, and turning for a moment he shouted: "It's me naice, that's who it is, Mrs. Callaghan, ma'am!" and walked on again stamping his stick louder than ever.

"Yere naice? Molleen, aquid?" muttered Judy after his retreating figure. "Aha! That ye mightn't come back, me little owld waysle! I know what ye're after as well as if I could see through yere back. Bad scan to ye an' the likes av ye—Heaven forgive me this night! Go on out o' that!" to the donkey; "t'would take a day an' a man to dhraw a kitch av turf wid ye."

Shamus reached home just in time for



supper, and in a state of nervous tension that made his surly tones still more surly. He knew that he must break the news of her approaching marriage to his niece, and he rather dreaded the scene he foresaw would take place; for if you took away his sharp tongue and eloquent blackthorn, you left only a weak, peevish old man. As he came in, Mollie was laying the table for them both; not a laborious undertaking, as the service consisted of two bowls of "thick" milk, and a cracked salt-cellar of damp salt.

"Are they boiled?" demanded the head of the house fiercely, to assure himself of his own firmness.

"Ay, are they," said his niece quietly, but glancing round with some apprehension; for she knew when a domestic storm was about to break over her head by the tone of his voice, as well as she knew when the wind was rising by the scream of a white-winged gull sweeping inland for shelter.

Shamus ate his supper in silence, and when he had finished turned to the fire so that his back was to the girl. He lit his pipe slowly, for his hand trembled, and settling himself lower over the glow, said shortly:

"Ye'll be married to-morra fortnight; the match is made be mesilf an' Father Clancy east, so let me have no talk at all out av ye."

"An' who is it?" asked Mollie after a pause, in which Shamus puffed with noisy indifference at his pipe, and she let the table-cloth she was holding gradually slip to the ground.

"James Clancy—the dacint man—on the side av the road, goin' into Banthry. He have——"

"Is it that little owld fairy?" said Mollie contemptuously. "Sure I'd crack him like the handle av a musheroon between me finger and thumb. And mind, I'm tellin' ye," she added, drawing herself up to her slender height, "I'll marry ne'er a wan in it only Con Ronan!"

"Do I hear ye sayin' that?" cried the old man, jerking himself to his feet. "Marry that blackguard? That thafe av a poacher? I tell ye——" but his anger stopped him, and he could only bang the floor helplessly with his stick.

"If ye called him ivery blackguard an' thafe ye could think av, 'twouldn't make e'er a taste av differ to me," said Mollie very quietly. "'Tis him will carry me before the priest, an' no other," and before Shamus could extricate himself from his fury she was gone.

When he found himself alone his anger seemed to evaporate very quickly, and he sat himself on the high-backed red settle near the fire, resting his chin on the top of his stick. He had not been prepared for such a cool reception of his news; and he felt vaguely that things were worse even than he had anticipated. While he gazed into the turf glow with ill-tempered apprehension written on his hard, wrinkled face, the door opened quickly and a big man came in, a young man with keen blue eyes and rough black hair, who shut the door behind him and crossed the earthen floor to the fire. Shamus, looking round hastily, saw it was Black Con who stood by him—the man he had forbidden his niece to marry—and scowling at him from beneath his bristling eyebrows, asked him with a snarl what he wanted that time o' night.

"On'y wan word," answered Con, in a deep voice. "Is it thrue what owld Judy Callaghan is praichin' about—that you have the match med for Mollie wid Jamseen Clancy?"

"'Tis thrue as the Book. An' what call have ye leppin' in on me to ax me that? If ye have the supper ate 'tis a dale fitter for ye go to ye're bed!"

The younger man drew himself up, breathing thickly, with his hands held firmly clenched by his sides.

"She'll marry ne'er a boy but meself," he said slowly, "ye know that. But 'tis the money that's playin' on ye. All the parish knows 'tis Prashtee's people are to have that—the devil carry every pinny av it from ye this blissed night!"

"Out av me sight," screamed Shamus, leaping up and striking out with his stick. "Ye common robber ye! Hit the road a welt, an' be quick, or——"

"Howld ye're stick!" said Black Con, sending the old man back to the settle with one shove; but he struggled to his feet, and would have struck again had not Mollie's trembling voice arrested him, and the girl herself appeared at the door that opened into "the room."

"Con, dear. Oh, Connie avic, go! In Heaven's name have no truck wid him!"

"Sure, I wouldn't touch him," said Con, backing out of reach of the stick; "an' I'll go too, quick enough. 'Tis no great things at all to take tay wid the likes av him. But never fear, Molleen, I'll git ye yit, in spite av his teeth!"

And Con shut the door after his retreat—ing figure just in time to save himself from a blow that dented the wood.

Mollie slept but little that night in her bed up under the thatch. Indeed, it was not until long after she had heard her uncle go into the room below, where he slept, that weariness overcame sorrow and she rested. Once she started up, dreaming her lover's voice cried to her, calling her to come as if he were in trouble, but she only heard the sea wind moaning in the dusk of morning, and she slept again. An hour after sunrise she was down, as usual, to set fresh turf on the embers that lived all night under the thick grey ash. As she crossed the kitchen something lay on the floor near the window, and she picked it up. It was a little canvas bag she had made herself and given Con to hold his black cake of tobacco, and wondering she had not seen it the night before, she hid it in her bosom to give it back when she saw him. Then she turned to mend the fire, but stopped once more, for the window by the door was open—wide open and swinging out in the morning breeze. She paused to wonder how it came so, and pulled it to slowly at last, altogether at a loss to account for it. But it wouldn't fasten, for the hasp was gone, and the white wood showed where it had been cut out—neatly whittled away with some sharp instrument. Mollie gave a little scream when she saw this, and crossed quickly to the door of the room where Shamus slept. But then she stopped for a moment, and her grey eyes opened wide at a thought that flashed across her mind. She took out the little tobacco pouch again and looked at it as if she thought she might have mistaken it, and her eyes looked more frightened as she thrust it guiltily inside her dress once more. It must have been he! But why—for what could he have come? She would tell her uncle nothing, either of what she had found or that the hasp had been cut from the window. No, she would just wake him as usual as if nothing had happened, and, pushing the door open, she went in. She took but one step into the room and stopped as if turned to stone; then, in a moment, she was back in the kitchen, prone on the earthen floor, trying with both hands to shut her ears to her own screams. For in there Shamus Ahearne lay, with his grey head thrown back on his pillow and a horrid gash in his throat. And there were great stains on the white counterpane—crimson where the morning sun fell, and black in the shadow.

Just then, Ned Callagher was climbing the hill, with his hammer tucked under one arm and his breakfast bundle under the

other, and the shrill screams from the little cottage struck his ear with such startling suddenness that he dropped both to hasten thither.

"In the name av th' Vargin, Mollie Ahearne childreen asthore, an' what the divil ails ye?" he cried, pushing open the door and standing over her.

"He's killed! Killed! Dead! with blood on him!" cried the girl, writhing where she lay. "Don't look at him! It's awful! Oh, uncle, avic, avic, is it gone from me ye are?"

"God have mercy on us all!" cried Ned, crossing himself. "Sure, I'll rise the counthry," and he hurried out muttering, "Sure, he was a cross little man, a mortal crabbed owld shtick; 'tis sorry I am I refused him the match he axed from me a' Sathurday. Begob, may be he have it all towld on me above be this. Heaven forgive me!"

When he was gone Mollie dragged herself to the door to get away from the awful presence of death, and then, as she sat, choking with sobs, an awful terror rushed over her. How did that little thing of Con's come to be in the cottage? He had said last night he wouldn't harm the old man, but—yes—she had seen him once so carried away by passion that he hardly—and, oh, Heaven! hadn't she dreamed of him calling her in a strange voice? And she bowed her head in misery. But they must never know—no one must know; and she stood up with a desperate look in her sad face as the sound of voices came up the hillside. On they poured, all the neighbours and half the village, until the cottage overflowed, and the awestruck crowd reached half-way down the borreen. Then came the priest, looking grave and with a kindly word for the girl now crouching by the hearth.

Soon the whispered questions grew louder, and people asked aloud: "Who did it?" And Mollie heard with a shudder the name "Black Con" whispered here and there, and then such phrases as "mortal black in a timper," "he have the fist wondhful ready an' he vexed," came to her ears; but she only clenched her teeth more firmly, and the hard, despairing look grew in her eyes.

Everybody seemed to know that "owld Judy" had told Black Con of the match made with James Clancy, and some one had seen him go to the cottage the evening before. Bridget Downey swore she "heerd 'em at it, an' she dhriving home her goat at nightfall, an' seen th'owld man,

God rist his poor sowl, makin' at Con, räal wicked, wid his shtick." That made them question Mollie about it.

"Hadn't the two some bother last night?"

"No, they hadn't a word," answered Mollie firmly—very firmly. "Con Ronan wasn't in it since Sunday night," she told Sergeant McGuild. She would swear she hadn't seen him there since then, she said. But she never raised her eyes from the fire, or ceased to wring her hands together. Then it was Father Murphy, who had baptized and confirmed her, and to whom she had always confessed the little things that had seemed so wicked. What were they all to what she was doing now?

"My poor girl, wasn't the young man wid ye last night?" he asked.

But she never raised her eyes. She only trembled, for she loved the old man, and believed that to lie to him was to leave no sin unsinned. She hesitated for a moment—until Con's blue eyes and a tangled black curl that used to fall on his forehead arose before her—and she said distinctly:

"No, Father."

The awful day passed slowly. Shamus Ahearne was laid beneath a sheet on the deal table in the kitchen, and six candles stood ready to give him light when the sun went down. The country was scoured for Black Con, but neither he nor Teddy Coyne was found.

"He'll come of hisself when he hears av it," said Mollie, still watching the fire and straining her fingers together. Yet she hardly hoped even that he would.

But he never came up the mountain-side again—of himself. Only that night Teddy Coyne was there, sobbing like a child, and three sturdy fishers from Berehaven to help him with his tale.

"He had his mind set on goin'," sobbed Teddy. "He towlt me he'd go out av his sinses if he stopped ashore. 'Twas the little owld boat we carried, and on'y the two av ourselves in it. 'Tis little fishin' we done, for he on'y sat all night watchin' th' water; an' 'Teddy,' says he, 'd'ye hear the win'?' 'I do,' I says, for 'twas keenin' fit to break ye're heart. 'Tis me own story 'tis tellin' me,' says he. 'That's what I come out for,' says he, 'to listen to it.' An' in the dusk av the mornin' it came to blowin' a wisp av a mist, an' the Berehaven boat hit us. An'—he—he was leanin' out watchin' the water, an' it must be the way he got sthruck in the head, for he on'y gives a little cry like for—for—some one—and we haven't found him yit."

"An' what time. was it ye started?" some one asked.

"Early, indeed; the night was young, an' we going down to the beach. 'Twasn't bedtime at all, at all."

"God be praised!" said the priest, "the poor boy hasn't this sin on his sowl!"

And, as he spoke, the girl by his side rose to her feet, crying wildly, "Con asthore, asthoreen! Forgive me!" and fell senseless in his arms.

## RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

*Author of "The Thirteenth Brudair," "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy," "The Vicar's Aunt," etc. etc.*

### CHAPTER V.

SIR RODERICK GRAEME was a young man gifted with what may either be a blessing or a curse, "private means." In plain words, he had an income derived from some property in Scotland—an income just large enough to enable him to do what he called "enjoy life quietly." He lived in a luxurious bachelor flat with another man; and he spent his days in doing precisely what he liked, which was easy enough. But it was harder to get complete satisfaction out of the process; and this he very often failed to do. He rode, he drove, he had a house-boat, he went to everything to which he ought to go, and he entertained a great deal in a quiet way. He was very popular in society; nobody knew the exact extent of his income, and report, taking for text his luxurious life, had discoursed upon it and magnified it abundantly. Many a mother looked with longing, anxious eyes towards Sir Roderick as a possible anchor for one of her drifting daughters. Many a young woman who was managing her own affairs of a matrimonial nature, looked hopefully towards him as a possible resting-place after a struggle that had lasted through several seasons. He was so exactly the right thing, these eager ones would urge. Such a nice place in Scotland! Quite as steady as most young men, and a title!

But the efforts implied in these ungrammatical aspirations met with no success. Whether his life quite satisfied him or not, Sir Roderick had no intention of improving it by taking a partner to share in his bliss. His money was enough for one, he said, but not nearly enough for two; and he had never yet seen the woman for whose

save he wished to starve. He was quite alone in the world, and had no ties, and the prospect of forming any grew year by year, evidently, further from his thoughts.

It was the absolute security he felt in her society that had led to his intimacy with Mrs. Fitzgerald. Their acquaintance had begun long ago, in Colonel Fitzgerald's lifetime, and after Mrs. Fitzgerald's widowhood Sir Roderick had slipped quite naturally into the position of "friend of the house." Sir Roderick Graeme was thoroughly well aware that Mrs. Fitzgerald was, as he expressed it, "not quite up to poor Fitzgerald's form, don't you know." But this fact made not the smallest difference to his friendship for her. He was not at all in the habit of appraising his acquaintances. The society life that he led had induced in him an easy toleration in which all his friends figured as "good sort of people." He went in and out of the house in Bryanston Street just as he liked. He escorted Mrs. Fitzgerald anywhere and everywhere; and though there had, of course, been a time when people talked of a possible future, the talk had died away and he had settled down in the eyes of the world, as in his own, as "just a friend."

He had accepted quite calmly Fergus Kennaway's appearance when that individual appeared as a rival to his position in the household. Kennaway was "all right," Sir Roderick said to himself; everybody knew him, and he went everywhere; he was, in fact, a rather prominent member of Sir Roderick's own set. The few bits of information he had ever gained as to Fergus Kennaway's private life were not of a kind that redounded exclusively to his credit. But the standard of morality in Sir Roderick's set was neither high nor exacting. So long as a man dressed well, knew the right people, and was amusing and agreeable, nothing more was required of him; and Fergus Kennaway fulfilled all these conditions.

But it was of Fergus Kennaway that he was thinking as he strolled slowly across the Park on the day after Mrs. Fitzgerald's dinner party, and his face was clouded with a certain undefined distaste. He was going to tea with some people he knew on the other side of the Park, but he was walking slowly and even saunteringly. In the middle of one of the paths he stopped short, and dug the end of his stick abruptly into the gravel.

"I can't make it out," he said to himself half aloud. "I don't exactly see why it

was caddish of him, but it was—that's all I know about it. And yet I don't know—it's absurd if one can't talk about a pretty servant-girl with a pair of fine eyes! And that's all he did, when all's said and done."

He took his stick out of the hole he had made in the gravel, traced a circle slowly and thoughtfully round the hole, and then sauntered on. He was a trifle perplexed with himself. He had never before disliked Fergus Kennaway or taken the slightest exception to any one of his proceedings. But the way in which he had spoken of Richenda Leicester had jarred upon him; jarred very unaccountably, as he thought. And Sir Roderick had thought of it a good deal during the time that had elapsed since the preceding evening. He was half inclined to despise Fergus Kennaway for it; and yet what right had he, what right had any one, to resent that sort of thing?

"It's absurd!" said Sir Roderick to himself. "And yet she somehow makes you feel as if she were quite another sort of girl."

He had just lifted his head after the last words, when he became aware of a little group of children going along the path in front of him. Next, he became aware that it was a very familiar group, and the next moment, he hardly knew why, he had quickened his pace and overtaken it. It consisted of Mrs. Fitzgerald's three children and their new nurse. The path they were taking bordered the Serpentine, and Brian was trudging along behind with a wet boat under his arm and a decidedly gloomy expression on his small countenance. He had just been snatched from the delights of sailing his boat.

Veronica's joyful and rather noisy greeting confused Sir Roderick's intentions, whatever they had been, as to speaking or not speaking to her nurse. He had barely satisfied the child's eagerness when something constrained him to raise his hat.

"How do you do?" he said, a little formally, to Richenda.

Richenda was not wheeling the mail-cart to-day. She held little Dolly by the hand, and only looked up from the child as he spoke. Her voice was quite as formal as his.

"How do you do?" she returned.

While he spoke to her Sir Roderick was looking into Richenda's face. He had an odd wish to satisfy himself as to whether this girl were or were not "the sort of girl" whom,



according to Sir Roderick's code of manners, Fergus Kennaway had a right to criticise freely. He did not stare openly at her, however; his glances were covert and unobtrusive; yet all the same he felt decidedly rebuked when Richenda, meeting his eyes as she spoke, met them with a steady dignity that made him feel, as he said to himself, "awfully small."

For diversion he turned to Veronica.

"Well, what do you think of your goings on last night?" he said. "I've spent the whole morning thinking what would be the best punishment for you. I'm the proper person to decide that, you know!"

"Oh, but, godfather"—the childish tone was very horror-struck—"a person can't help walking in its sleep!"

"A person that is properly brought up," he returned, "doesn't walk in the drawing-room in its nightgown when it ought to be in bed! You wait a few minutes and I'll consider the subject."

But his last words fell on the air. Veronica, not at all sure whether he was in jest or earnest, thought it wiser, at any rate, to discontinue the conversation. She had slipped behind, unobserved, to walk with Brian; and Sir Roderick found himself, to all intents and purposes, alone with Richenda. He ought—he knew it at the time, and he knew it afterwards—to have forthwith taken formal leave of her and gone his way. But he did not.

"Were you—I hope you didn't catch it awfully last night?" he began.

Richenda lifted to him a pair of surprised, clear eyes.

"I don't understand you!" she said coldly.

"I mean—I hope that wretch of a child didn't get you into an awful scrape—that little goose Veronica?"

"Oh!"

Richenda's interjection was decidedly frigid. In another moment her words and her manner would have ended all conversation between them for good. She meant them to do so; but then, somehow, she did not quite know how, her eyes were suddenly full of tears, and it was all she could do to keep them from falling. She had met his eyes, and the sympathetic concern she saw there was a touch on her sore heart that suddenly annihilated that sense of their respective positions by which she had been possessed.

"Oh, it was all my fault!" she faltered. "Mrs. Fitzgerald was very angry with me,

and I deserved it, no doubt. Still, I didn't know she walked in her sleep."

The young man bit his slight moustache savagely.

"Idiotic little beggar!" he said.

The force with which the words were uttered certainly did not apply to poor Veronica.

"You see," she went on rather plaintively, "if I had only known I could have looked out for her! Indeed, I'm sure I will next time."

Richenda was smarting a little under the injustice of having been blamed for what was not her fault. Mrs. Fitzgerald's rebuke had been, like all her chidings to any one and every one, a short outburst of indiscriminating anger because she herself had been personally inconvenienced. No idea of justice or reason had tempered it. And, also, it had been couched in language of a kind which had never before been addressed to Richenda, but with which all Mrs. Fitzgerald's servants were well acquainted. The unspoken, almost unconscious, deference and consideration of Sir Roderick's manner was as grateful to the unacknowledged sense of degradation which rankled sorely in poor Richenda's heart, as was his oddly expressed sympathy to the wounded feelings to which she owned.

"Oh, but there won't be a next time!" he responded cheerily. "You'll see! I'm sure she doesn't do it often, and I expect she got excited about your coming, and——"

"Nurse! Godfather!"

The words came in two little sharp shrieks, and Richenda and Sir Roderick turned with a simultaneous start.

About fifty yards behind them Veronica was dancing and waving her small hands in an agony of excited terror. At the foot of the shelving bank that went down to the edge of the Serpentine, Brian's small form was just slipping from the edge into the water, while his small hands clutched wildly at the tufts of grass on the edge. Richenda turned white as ashes, and clutched Dolly's hand tightly. She stood as if paralysed. Sir Roderick set off at a sharp run, flinging his coat off as he went. In another moment he had pushed gently aside the sobbing Veronica and made his way to the edge. One of Brian's small hands was still maintaining a desperate clutch, though it was slipping fast. The little fingers were just unloosening when Sir Roderick, giving his left hand to a bystander to hold for support, reached over,

and with his right caught the drenched little scrap of humanity by the collar and landed Brian, dripping like a little half-drowned terrier, safely on the bank.

He only paused one moment to recover breath.

"Look here," he said briefly to Richenda, as he came up the path with Brian in his arms to where she stood trembling and waiting with Dolly and Veronica, "I'm going to take this imp home in a cab. You come after with the children. I'll settle it all right for you! Give me my coat, some one."

And before Richenda could speak, Sir Roderick had set off at full speed with Brian in his arms to the nearest cab-stand.

#### CHAPTER VI.

THE weather, which had been so hot, changed suddenly to the coldest and most east-windy days known to an English June. In Mrs. Fitzgerald's nursery, partly on account of this, and partly on account of Brian, who had had a slight cold ever since his ducking in the Serpentine, a tiny fire had been burning throughout the afternoon; and it was only now slowly dying away. It was eight o'clock; the children were all in bed, and Richenda was alone in the nursery.

It was a large, long room on the top floor, furnished both prettily and sensibly with a good carpet, a table in one of its three windows, a cupboard, and a few chairs that left plenty of room for an enormous rocking-horse, and many another of the children's cherished toys. It was in the front of the house, and the windows faced the street. Richenda was sitting at the table. In front of her lay her small, black leather writing-case and some writing-paper; but the writing-case was unopened, and the writing-paper untouched. Richenda's elbows were on the table, and with her small face supported on the palms of her two hands she was gazing steadily and fixedly out of the window. It was a long window, and its sill was below the level of the table, giving her an uninterrupted view of the prospect out of doors.

The prospect in question was by no means interesting or alluring. There is no phase of daylight more dreary and more depressing than the hard grey light of a long sunless summer's evening. The outlines of the opposite houses seemed to stand out sharp and hard in its clearness; and the street, the pavement, and the sky were

all the same dull grey. Through a gap between two houses a few trees belonging to a back garden were visible. And somehow the glimpse thus obtained of their long arms, clothed with delicate fresh green, being swayed and pitilessly torn in the biting wind, seemed the culminating point of the whole dreary aspect. Richenda had examined it all with weary, dispirited eyes when she first settled herself down at the table; but now her steady gaze took in none of the scene or its details.

It was a Wednesday, and she had been exactly a fortnight in her "place," as she called it to herself bitterly. And the difficulties and trials of that "place" and her position in it were cutting deeper than her brave heart had ever dreamed.

Richenda Leicester was very sweet-tempered; that is to say, her temper was always under good control. She had immense conscientiousness, and a reserve fund of untiring patience. She had also a strong will, and a great deal of the quality without which no character can develop itself—a steady self-respect. Though she did not think about it, or analyse her feelings, she had felt vaguely that she was quite well equipped for the battle of life, and quite competent to take her future in her hands and shape it to her own wishes. On that long past evening at home when the brothers and sister had talked together over the fire, she had thought with a heart that beat high and hopefully that only her training was necessary to enable her to carve out for herself a career which, if humble, should be at least distinguished on its own lines. And though she had come anxiously and tremblingly to her work at first, the background of her hope and confidence had never moved.

Perhaps the first of poor Richenda's hopes had received its death-blow at the sight of Mrs. Fitzgerald. She had hoped that she might have a woman as mistress who would treat her as a friend, and as, what Richenda knew herself to be, a lady. Of course, when she saw Mrs. Fitzgerald and felt the first touch of her manner, all these hopes were thrown down. She knew that she should have a mistress in the sense that a servant has a mistress, and no other. Richenda was not the girl to give up Mrs. Fitzgerald's situation for one disappointment; she had entered on her work bravely enough, thinking that, after all, the kind of woman she had to serve mattered but little if she did but serve her faithfully. Still, the disappoint-

ment was there, and it had been a sore one.

It was in this very matter of faithful service that poor Richenda's second disappointment had visited her. All through the first and second day she had thought that things were going so smoothly, that she was doing her work carefully, and leaving no detail undone. Then on the second evening had come Veronica's unfortunate sleep-walking to bring Richenda the crushing blow of Mrs. Fitzgerald's anger. She had scarcely recovered from that when her second rebuke awaited her. This had hurt the girl's feelings in many ways far more than the first.

Sir Roderick Graeme had kept his word, and had made the most ample explanation of the circumstances which led to Brian's accident. But, not unnaturally, the fact that Sir Roderick was concerned in the explanation at all had only made Mrs. Fitzgerald more angry with Richenda. It was not exactly the fact of his meeting them in itself; he had met and talked to the children hundreds of times before, Mrs. Fitzgerald had cried, exaggeratedly, but he had never, she said, received from any one of her nurses what she called "such encouragement to talk." But on this the girl had faced her mistress with such angrily burning cheeks and such proudly shining eyes, that Mrs. Fitzgerald, half alarmed, had brought her scolding to a close with a little sarcastic, biting taunt which had hurt Richenda more than all that had gone before. And since that day, though she had interchanged no words with Sir Roderick Graeme, Mrs. Fitzgerald never let her forget that first taunt. Innuendoes, half uttered sentences, mocking little smiles were the weapons Mrs. Fitzgerald used, apparently without any idea of the loss her personal dignity sustained in so doing.

Richenda quivered under them one and all. She could not resent them, they were too careless in manner for that; so she bore them with the bravest front she could show, and only smarted inwardly. She was thinking, as she sat looking out of the window, of the life of the past fortnight, and all it had brought and taught her. She was thinking over Mrs. Fitzgerald's light gibes about Sir Roderick, and she was thinking how little foundation there was for them. She was also thinking of another train of circumstances against which none of Mrs. Fitzgerald's sneers would have seemed to Richenda too pointed or too biting. But Mrs. Fitzgerald, devoting all

her perceptions to what did not exist, saw nothing whatever of what did. Mr. Fergus Kennaway was in Richenda's life a far keener source of distress than her employer's taunting words. She had by no means forgotten his first insulting stare when he managed to contrive an opportunity for a second. Only two days later Richenda and the children had been crossing over from the Park to their own side of the way, when a block in the traffic had brought them to an island. In the block, in aansom, just on a level with the island, was Mr. Fergus Kennaway. He had promptly got out, paid the driver, and planted himself on the island with Richenda and the children. Richenda had seen his proceedings and understood exactly what they meant; but to escape from him was impossible, to ignore his presence was impossible, and Richenda had had to stand patiently, exposed to a second long and insolent stare, while he extracted from Veronica every detail respecting their usual walks and likely places of resort during the next few days. He had not spoken to her on that occasion, it was true; but on the next time no such restraint curbed his speech. This next meeting came about in the South Kensington Museum. Richenda had taken the children there as the most secluded of all the places detailed with such misplaced fluency by Veronica, when he appeared for the third time. He had greeted Richenda familiarly; he had entered into a conversation which the most immoveable silence on her part could not end; and he had finally—Richenda's cheeks burned whenever she thought of it—told her that she was the prettiest girl he knew.

Since then he had called with unmistakable persistency at times when he knew he should meet the children either going in or coming out. Altogether he had not left Richenda a day's peace of mind since his first sight of her.

She was wondering now, as she had several times wondered before, whether she should tell Mrs. Fitzgerald of Mr. Kennaway's undisguised pursuit of her. She could not make up her mind what to do. She would have told her mistress, and appealed to her for her help, if it had not been for the mocking sneers that had been lavished on her in connection with another man. She shrank from exposing herself to a whole new series of attacks, and she hoped against hope that some chance—the children's talk, for instance—might make Mr. Kennaway's proceedings known. She

fell back on this conclusion again now, after a long and weary consideration of a meeting with him that had taken place that very afternoon; and then Richenda's chin went down suddenly deeper into the hollows of her two hands, and her thoughts seemed to become deeper too.

They had wandered from Fergus Kenna-way to the other man whom chance had thrown into her life during the past fortnight. She was thinking just a little bitterly of the contrast of the behaviour of the two during the last two weeks. She had seen Sir Roderick Graeme a great many times since the day of Brian's accident; but beyond the barest polite recognition, he had taken no notice of her. He had even been up to have tea with Brian, when his cold was at its worst, and had devoted the whole of the hour he stayed to mechanical experiments with the boy, without so much as casting one glance in Richenda's direction as she sat sewing by the window. He had always been very polite, very courteous, Richenda owned to herself now, with a little upward curl of her lip; he had behaved exactly as he ought to behave—to a servant!

"He thinks I am a servant," she said to

herself, "and so he is perfectly polite to me. He is so nice, he always would be polite to a servant. And yet I thought—I thought that he understood. I thought—oh, what a horrid world it is!"

And then the unreasoning Richenda, who had just been so very angry with one man for paying her too much attention, was even angrier with the other because he did not pay her a little more.

"He did not even take the trouble to find out," she said scornfully. "He just takes everything for granted."

And then Richenda's eyes were fixed on the cold, wind-swept trees, but, instead of seeing them, she saw a simple, attractive, manly face; and she contrasted it with the other that she had grown to dislike so much. It grew clearer and clearer before her eyes, and she turned with a quick start when the nursery door opened with an impatient click, and Amelia, the smart parlourmaid, set down Richenda's supper-tray on the table with a jerk.

"Kate's out, it seems," she said, "and so I've got to bring your supper up. Here it is, if you can leave off dreaming of your sweethearts to look at it!"

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